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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000757

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: FNDD: EMPTY PROMISES FROM AZIZ AND CONCERN FOR
ABDALLAHI'S SAFETY

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 677

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (C) Summary: Anti-coup FNDD coalition leaders see General Aziz's supposed promise to release President Abdallahi "without conditions" as empty, and the upcoming "National Dialogue on Democracy" equally devoid of substance. They are also concerned for Abdallahi's personal safety, and see international pressure as crucial to the upcoming AU meeting in Addis Ababa December 22. End summary.

12. (C) PolAsst met December 18 with Mohamed Ould Maouloud (President of the UFP party, co-leader of the FNDD, and de facto "foreign minister" for President Abdallahi) and Mohamed Abdellahi Ould Babane (former Mauritanian ambassador). The conversation began with a discussion on potential surveillance by the regime on UFP headquarters and other FNDD hotspots. Maouloud, while acknowledging the inferior technical capabilities of the Mauritanian security services, said that nevertheless it was a concern. "We assume that they can listen in on everything," Maouloud said.

13. (C) FNDD plans for the "National Dialogue on Democracy": Maouloud and Babane reiterated once again the FNDD's steadfast rejection of the junta's upcoming "National Dialogue on Democracy" scheduled to begin on December 27. Describing the dialogue as a venue for people to "applaud and sing the praises of Aziz," Maouloud said the true outcome was never in doubt: legitimization of Aziz and his "rectification." Babane emphasized the need for the international community to condemn the "National Dialogue" in order to deny legitimacy to the junta. When asked about the FNDD's plans for protests or demonstrations against the dialogue, Maouloud observed their limited options: they could try to obtain a large conference hall for rallies (difficult now, because owners did not want to be implicated with anti-coup forces), or they could take to the streets and risk violent confrontation with the police.

14. (C) "Liberation" of President Abdallahi: When asked about General Aziz's commitment to release Abdallahi unconditionally by December 24, Maouloud and Babane expressed skepticism. Saying that this was just another attempt by the junta to buy more time and divide the international community, Maouloud flatly stated, "it means nothing." If Abdallahi were truly freed, then he would be able to assume

his duties as president, Maouloud reasoned. Moreover, he doubted Abdallahi would be allowed to travel abroad, given the public relations headache this would cause for the High State Council. Babane added that he found it curious that Aziz didn't make a statement himself about the impending release of Abdallahi, preferring instead to let the Europeans announce it. "Why not use this to his own advantage?" Babane asked rhetorically, implying that Aziz had made a verbal promise to the Europeans, but no such pledge in the Mauritanian press, giving him "wiggle room" to renege on the deal.

15. (C) Fears for Abdallahi's security: Maouloud and Babane both expressed deep concerns for Abdallahi's personal security, particularly if and when he is released "unconditionally." Stating that Abdallahi had no security detail now, and with Aziz stirring up public sentiment against him, an attempt on his life was quite possible. The pro-coup partisans seem to think that "if Abdallahi is assassinated, then there are no more problems," and the anti-coup resistance will collapse, Maouloud said.

16. (C) Senegalese Foreign Minister visit: PolAsst inquired about the recent visit by Senegalese Foreign Minister Cheikh Tidjane Gadio to Abdallahi in Lemden, noting that the press had not given any details of what was discussed between the two. Maouloud replied that, unfortunately, he had no further details to provide either. "We have problems of communication at the moment" between Lemden and Nouakchott, he said, adding that they have reduced their cell phone communications significantly, assuming that all calls are

NOUAKCHOTT 00000757 002 OF 002

monitored now. Note: Maouloud stated to Charge previously that Mauritel -- the only phone company with service in Lemden -- installed extra equipment after Abdallahi's arrival, presumably to facilitate surveillance (Reftel). End note.

17. (C) Request for international pressure: Describing the upcoming AU Peace and Security Council meeting in Addis Ababa on December 22 as "crucial," Babane stressed the need for the international community, and particularly the United States, to make Zambian Ambassador (and current PSC chair) Patrick Sinyinza aware of the current situation in Mauritania. Babane viewed Sinyinza as potentially sympathetic to the anti-coup cause, and hoped to see firm action taken by the AU against the military regime.

18. (C) Terrorism: Maouloud had sharp criticism for the military leadership, citing the security void the country had witnessed over the past year. Though Abdallahi had given "carte blanche" to Aziz and the military on security matters, Mauritania still suffered numerous attacks: French tourists were killed, Mauritanian soldiers were ambushed, and there were gun battles in the neighborhoods of Nouakchott between security forces and suspected terrorists. "For any of these lapses, the generals should have been relieved of their duties," he said. Turning to more recent events, he feared that terrorism was being used by the junta to blackmail the international community into supporting the current regime in the name of security and stability. Ironically, he said, the current system was "totally ineffective for combating terrorism," noting that the military chiefs are too entangled in politics to properly manage a campaign against terrorists, smugglers, and illegal immigration.

19. (C) Historical parallels: Noting Maouloud's background in history (he holds a Doctorate in history from the Sorbonne) PolAsst asked if he saw any historical parallels or lessons to be drawn from Mauritania's current situation. Citing a weak yet authoritarian regime, tribal conflicts, and regional instability, Maouloud said that Mauritania had entered a dangerous period "without precedent" in its history. If the regime succeeded in clinging to power, Maouloud envisioned a never-ending cycle of coups, leading to

an eventual collapse of the state not unlike that seen in Somalia. Finishing off his glass of tea, Maouloud smiled and said, "But it's been a long time since I was a teacher of history."

HANKINS